NEW BOOKS SEEN THROUGH REVIEWS AND COMMENT

CRITICAL REVIEWS OF THE SEASON'S LATEST BOOKS

Mr. Palmer's Clever War Story—An Ingenuous Vagabond Heroine—Four Social Reprimands.

Remote Newfoundland, a Talented Peasant Boy, and a Gospel Legend in New Fiction.

Five Works of Biography—Books on Painting, English Literature, Chess and Other Subjects.

Fictitious warfare is not the most exciting form of reading, so that it is just as well that the central point of Frederick Palmer's "The Last Shot" (Charles Scribner's Sons) should be the struggle in a woman's soul over what it is right for her to do rather than the demonstration of the wrongfulness of war. To the two typical nations, armed to the teeth, as is the fashion in Europe, the author does not deign to give names. The aggressors attack when they are ready, but the other side is prepared. There are no especial innovations except that there is a good deal of fighting by airships and the power of ammunition is perhaps increased. The greater operations are a trifle misty, but the incidents of fighting are vivid and give the chance for sketching character.

The scene is the heroine's home, which serves as the headquarters of the invading army. She objects to this because she believes in universal peace, and tries hard to make the opposing commanders desist. She wishes to remain neutral, but is gradually forced to take the side of the attacked country. She spies on the invading General, who is driven merely by personal ambition, helps to lead him into a trap, and after a while feels justified by the result. It is clever work and there is enough of a story to hold the reader's attention throughout, but though the author makes many an opportunity to declaim eloquently against war we cannot see that he has demonstrated that war is unjustifiable. With grim humor he makes both commanders dodge bullets instinctively at the end, because with all their work at headquarters neither had been under fire before in his life.

A Vagabond Heroine.

An agreeable variation in the Broad Highway style of stories is made by F. Tennyson Jesse in "The Milky Way" (George H. Doran Company) by making the vagabond a girl and an art student at that. We are informed that the author is a niece of the poet; surely she can only be a great great grandniece, for the story is ingenuously young. There is a hero of course, also a vagabond; he plays on a penny whistle, and inevitably his name is Peter. These young people are penniless and homeless; they meet with one absurd adventure after another, or rather pass through one continuous adventure that is transformed into something unexpected at every turn like the pantomime tricks. As they progress they gather in their train a strange retinue; a baby, a half witted girl, two female art students, a cat, an estimable youth and others who drop off.

The adventures are often exciting and generally amusing, they spread across all England and even across the Channel to Paris and Provence. They are accompanied with much pretty sentiment, which somehow is reminiscent of the models the author has followed and does not sound as genuine as her fun. The trip to Provence is a mistake, for it is taken probably to lengthen out the story, and the author indulges in recollections of travel which jar with the general tone. What is worse, her vagabonds engage in the Philistine endeavor to earn money. When she gets ready to wind up she allows the heroine to decide that she does love Peter and marries them. The author is inclined to carry the frank expressions of the studios a bit too far, but she rarely approaches impropriety. She has written a very entertaining book, which would have been better with a little judicious pruning.

Tales That Chide Society.

The harm that is done by the empty lives brought on by the pursuit of social ambitions is the theme of James Oppenheim in "Idle Wives" (the Century Company), so his people must be taken as types that must illustrate the theme and not as human beings. Otherwise it would be difficult to see how within seven years a capable settlement worker who does her own housework on marrying should have drifted entirely away from her children and her ideals. She is aroused by her brother's engagement to his stenographer, with a needless early marital misadventure to her account, to assert herself, which she does by leaving her husband and family and becoming a probation officer. In that capacity she is enabled to rescue the wayward daughter of some estimable dwellers in tenements. When that is done her husband has learned not to pursue wealth for its own sake and she returns to his roof determined to make it a home. The story is told fluently and no doubt society will be ashamed of itself.

A moral tale also is told by Maximilian Foster in "Keeping Up Appearances" (Appleton's). A discontented clerk in a Western city obtains a position at a higher salary in New York. He is eager to splurge, and meets at once with the joyful spenders of money in public places. The author describes graphically the straits in which the young man and his wife find themselves when they try to keep up the pace. After a few months of living beyond his salary with little comfort to either, the crash comes and he is fortunate enough to be taken back in his former place, with a chastened and more contented spirit. Here again improbabilities must be overlooked for the sake of the lesson, and here again society is asked to blush at its misdeeds. The author writes fluently and some of his hits are bright.

In the anonymous "The Gold Fish" (The Century Company) we have not a story, but a rich man's taking stock of what he gets for his money. He has his million and, with his professional earnings, has an income of $75,000 a year. The author who seems to have a grudge against silk pajamas and perfumed cigarettes makes him tell how all of this and more is spent and how little he gets out of it, or of his wife's society, his children or his friends. Neither is he pleased with his intellectual attainments nor with the state of his morals. Having exposed the hollow sham that the average rich man of New York is, the author proceeds to rescue this particular one. A visit to the home of his confidential clerk, who lives sensibly, impels him to plead with his wife to lead a more sincere life with him, and she agrees. He is helped in his meditations by comparisons with his father and grandfather. Again a sermon against society as it is.

A little more imagination, perhaps, would have saved the Rev. Charles M. Sheldon from any imputation of irreverence in writing "Jesus Is Here!" (Hodder and Stoughton; George H. Doran Company). He certainly intends none in his assumption that the Saviour returns to earth, for he merely chooses the form of fiction for his sermon, and if he takes for granted that the Divine will favors his own views on public matters he is certainly not alone among ministers in doing so. Our function is simply to form an estimate of the story. So far as we can see, the effect of the appearance on the church people is merely to confirm them in their faith, which was apparently a little shaky. The author is very effective in making people unable to describe the appearance, in the impression the news makes on the public, and in the striking picture of the editor who is bound to get at the truth of the matter. He shows discrimination in never quoting words or sayings, but reporting only the substance of speeches. The good taste of the manner in which social matters are dealt with, such as child labor and the liquor question, or church affairs, the reader will decide according to his own prejudices. The impression made by the book is not very strong, but the public it appeals to is a peculiar one.

Heredity at Fault.

In Priscilla Craven's story of "Circe's Daughter" (Duffield and Company) the daughter in question did not turn out as her friends feared. Inherited impulses may have made themselves felt in her blood, but Claudia resisted them very well and she was not like her mother. It was a mistake to marry Gilbert Currey, who was a self-centred and not very interesting person. Carey Image, friend of the family, had indeed a queer name, but his discernment was excellent. He had no difficulty in perceiving that Gilbert's consideration of marriage was calculating and unromantic, not to say cold. We had our own doubts of Gilbert early in the story on reading that "the nostrils of his well shaped nose were somewhat wide, denoting his energy and driving power." We felt that he could be disagreeable.

Claudia's mother thought well of Ninon de l'Enclos, but Claudia hardly showed a disposition to imitate that unscrupulous beauty. The chapter entitled "Two in a Studio" shows that Circe's daughter had herself under pretty good control. Hamilton, the artist, was surprised and annoyed at her powers of restraint. He was not a wonderful lover, and the reader will hardly share his surprise. As for Colin Paton, the sociologist, he was far from being a dangerous man. He had no selfish or incendiary qualities. He was a good and faithful friend, who waited patiently and long, and when he received and obeyed the telegram, "Come, Claudia," it was proper for him to go, for the invitation was from a widow.

Other Recent Fiction.

A charming little story has been constructed out of the simplest materials by George Van Schaick in "Sweetapple Cove" (Small, Maynard and Company, Boston). A young doctor banishes himself to a remote and desolate corner of Newfoundland and finds plenty of work to keep him busy among the simple people on the coast. An old gentleman comes for the salmon fishing with his yacht and his daughter and is laid up with a broken leg. They stay on, with the result that may be anticipated. She is an unusually nice girl. The doctor is a fine fellow, the minister, his wife, the fishermen are delightful, a salmon is caught and an elk shot, there is sailing in storm and fog, all joined in an enjoyable story in a novel setting.

The pleasant story of a talented peasant boy who makes his way through school on a mediæval endowment is told by Mary J. H. Skrine in "Bedesman 4" (The Century Company). He is never ashamed of his parents and his sister, whom he leaves behind him as he advances. He is aided by a nice girl. The last part, which describes his college career, is less satisfactory and in the episode with his servant girl sister the author is rather snobbish.

In "Wayside Neighbors" (Longmans, Green and Company) the anonymous author shows the same distinction of style that marked her previous sketches. She unfortunately selects gloomy subjects and regards them in no cheerful spirit, so that the religious reflections with which they close are hardly consoling. The vivid realism is striking and so is the condescension with which the author looks upon coarser clay. The superiority of the army officer over his subordinates seems to have become part of her nature.

In spite of a certain artlessness F. F. Bingham has written an entertaining story pleasantly in "Ashore at Maiden's Walk" (Broadway Publishing Company). It tells of the cruise of a cotton schooner along the Florida coast after it has been taken as a prize in the last days of the war. A Yankee prize crew with an amiable officer and a belligerent Confederate maiden with a philosophic father keep the reader amused, while the author exhibits his nautical knowledge.

The form of fiction has been chosen by the Rev. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis to convey the legend of the first writing down of the Gospels in "The Story of Phædrus" (Macmillans). It is an interesting story in spite of various excursions into Roman social life. The weakest portions, we suspect, are the embellishments that constitute the "fiction."

Like a number of other English stories in recent years "Drum's House," by Ida Wild (E. P. Dutton and Company), dawdles along pleasantly and cheerfully, with a cynical bit here and there, to end suddenly in a hideous tragedy. There is nothing to prepare the reader for this, as there is no hint of any sort of perversity in the people concerned. It seems to be a sudden and unpleasant whim of the author's.

A humorous protest against managing women, no matter how capable, is made by Alice Duer Miller in a short story called "Things" (Charles Scribner's Sons). Women who like to have things just so will hardly relish the story.

Nine very well written stories by Richard Curle are included in "Life Is a Dream" (Doubleday, Page and Company). Almost all are disagreeable, though in the cases where the author cares to tell the story they are effective enough. In the longest tale, describing a boarding house in Malaga, with its inmates, the psychology is so subtle that it escapes us, though it is clear that the author did not like his fellow boarders.

The experiences of four boys who started a theatre in the barn are related by Max Aley in "The Barnstormers" (Charles Scribner's Sons). The book seems to be not so much a story as an incentive to other boys to do likewise, the narrator describing how things were done and providing the plots of several melodramas.

Biographical.

It is a commentary on "Tolstoy" rather than a biographical sketch that Edward Garnett has contributed to the "Modern Biographies" series (Constable and Company; Houghton Mifflin Company). If the reader is familiar with the biography and the writings of Tolstoy he may be able to determine how applicable the isolated phrases and brief judgments are which the biographer employs in impressionistic fashion. In the little book he tries to cover too much ground and cares more to make known his own high estimate of Tolstoy than to put his information in a form that may enlighten the reader.

An interesting account of the last years of "Joseph Pulitzer" is given by Alleyne Ireland (Mitchell Kennerley, New York). The author was greatly interested in his employer, and while admiring him for many qualities and sympathizing with his affliction describes frankly and vividly his manner and his mental attitude and the difficulties under which the men who tried to serve him worked. It is an excellent and honest picture of one side of Mr. Pulitzer in the last two years of his life.

One of the most entertaining of biographies, a wide read classic in its day, Edward John Trelawney's "Adventures of a Younger Son," has been added in a two volume form to the attractive reissue of "Bohn's Popular Library" in pocket volumes printed on thin paper. The early life of the man who was to be Shelley's and Byron's Trelawney was as thrilling a romance as any that Stevenson imagined, at least according to Trelawney's own account. It is a book that deserves to be better known by the present generation, if not as a biography, at any rate as a tale of adventure.

Though the volume of "Life, Letters and Addresses of John Craig Havemeyer" (Fleming H. Revell Company) is devoted chiefly to the religious activities and reforms in which he engaged, there is matter of more general interest in the extracts from diaries and letters which describe social conditions in New York half a century or more ago.

A biography of John Hyde De Forest, a Yale graduate who spent many years in Japan, "The Evolution of a Missionary," by his daughter, Charlotte B. De Forest (Fleming H. Revell Company), gives an interesting picture of life in Japan and of the peculiar difficulties missionaries in that country have to contend with.

Practical Information.

Two more of Prof. John C. Van Dyke's helpful little "New Guides to Old Masters" (Charles Scribner's Sons) that have come to hand, "Amsterdam, The Hague, Haarlem" and "Brussels, Antwerp," should almost be bound together, for travellers who need the one must almost inevitably need the other also. Where such a complete survey of the Dutch and Flemish painters is possible it is rather provoking that the author should restrict himself to the galleries. The first class pictures in churches and public buildings would add little to the bulk of the volumes. Antwerp without the Rubens in the cathedral seems absurd.

The "Introduction to the Study of English Literature," by W. T. Young (Cambridge University Press; G. P. Putnam's Sons), is a remarkably sensible little book, a really helpful guide to literature, provided it is not perverted into a text book. It is in substance a well digested boiling down of the essentials in the big "Cambridge History of English Literature," an outline of the books there are to be read. There is no reason why youth on discovering in this book the authors it thinks it would like should not turn directly to them, instead of first having its ardor quenched by consulting the "History" to which the author refers him and similar books.

Though burdened by a good deal of pedagogical scaffolding, there is much good sense in Julia Darrow Cowles's "The Art of Story Telling" (A. C. McClurg and Company, Chicago). It is not a manual of composition, but a set of directions as to how to tell stories verbally. With these she prints a number of simple stories which are valuable as examples for intelligent teachers of the kind of stories they should pick out themselves for their young charges.

Much general advice to persons intending to build that should prove useful if properly pondered on is supplied by Benjamin A. Howes in "Building, by a Builder" (Doubleday, Page and Company). The author criticises many things that are done commonly both by the prospective owners and the persons they employ, he suggests many important things that should be attended to, and his remarks apply to public buildings as well as to private constructions.

A set of interesting and instructive problems will be found in a little book by W. P. Turnbull, "Chessmen in Action," (George Routledge and Sons; E. P. Dutton and Company). Solutions are given at the end.

An interesting report on the economic conditions and prospects of British women who have a professional training has been edited by Edith J. Morley in "Women Workers in Seven Professions" (George Routledge and Sons; E. P. Dutton and Company). The report on teaching is the longest, as that probably affects the largest number of women; next comes nursing and after that medicine. Other occupations are dealt with more briefly; they are sanitary inspectors, the civil service, clerks and secretaries and actresses. Much attention is given to statistics. American women who are discontented with their lot might learn something from this survey of the relative disadvantage under which their British sisters are living. The writers of the articles are all women.

A new edition of a sensible book by Dr. Edward O. Otis, "The Great White Plague," is published under the changed and more appropriate title "Tuberculosis, Its Cause, Cure and Prevention" (Thomas Y. Crowell and Company). The text has been revised, but the author finds that while organization to fight the disease has increased greatly few new discoveries have been made since the first edition appeared. In arrangement and language the object of informing the layman is kept in view.

The same subject is treated also with the requirements of the layman in mind by Dr. Lawrence F. Flick in "Consumption, a Curable and Preventable Disease" (Peter Reilly, Philadelphia). It makes the matter as plain as need be, and like the other book encourages hope.

A lecture on "The Fundamental Basis of Nutrition" by Dr. Graham Lusk, explaining clearly and simply the scientific view of nutrition, is printed by itself by the Yale University Press, New Haven.